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SUBJECT: NATO AMBASSADOR BURNS' VISIT TO HELSINKI

REF: HELSINKI 01499

Classified By: Ambassador Earle I. Mack for reasons 1.4(B) and (D)

Summary

1. (U) U.S. Ambassador to NATO R. Nicholas Burns visited Helsinki November 29-30. Following remarks given to the Atlantic Council of Finland at a seminar on NATO and small nations, Ambassador Burns participated in meetings with Minister of Defense Seppo Kaariainen and MFA Under Secretary for Political Affairs Jaakko Laajava. He also addressed NATO Ambassadors at the Estonian Embassy and participated in press interviews. End Summary.

Atlantic Council Seminar

2. (U) Ambassador Burns spoke in Helsinki on November 29 in a seminar organized by the Atlantic Council of Finland, to an audience of 170 leading foreign policy experts and commentators. His audience also included a sizable group of students from the National Defense College. The title of the seminar was "Small States and NATO." Ambassador Burns also gave an interview to Finland's leading daily, independent Helsingin Sanomat (circulation 440,000) which was published on November 30. The Finnish Broadcasting Company's senior diplomatic correspondent also taped an interview with Ambassador Burns to air as part of an upcoming Sunday morning talk show. In his speech and in the newspaper interview, Ambassador Burns stressed Finland's contributions to NATO-led operations as a PfP country, praising Finland's (and Sweden's) conceptual leadership role in the PfP program. He noted that NATO membership is an issue for Finns to decide, suggested that some Finns' and Swedes' Cold War conception of NATO is outdated, and described the new NATO as a democratic, stronger, and more flexible alliance. In the newspaper interview, Ambassador Burns discussed the possibility of non-allies participating in NATO's Response Force (NRF) and praised Finland's participation in peacekeeping in Kosovo, Afghanistan and elsewhere.

MFA Meeting

3. (U) At the Foreign Ministry, Ambassador Burns met with Jaakko Laajava, Under Secretary for Political Affairs (and Ambassador-designate to the UK); Pilvi-Sisko Vierros-Villeneuve, Director of the Arms Control Unit (and Political Director-Designate); and Elina Kalkku, Director of the Security Policy Unit. Ambassador Burns was accompanied by Ambassador Mack, POL Chief Hall, and Executive Assistant Barrett.

4. (U) Ambassador Burns began by thanking Finland for what it is doing in NATO, particularly in the Balkans and Afghanistan. All non-member nations who contribute troops to NATO-led operations now are present at meetings related to those operations, which is as it should be.

5. (SBU) Ambassador Burns emphasized that President Bush sees NATO as "absolutely vital", and is a strong believer in giving the Partnership for Peace a greater say in decision making. Burns called Laajava's attention to the President's November 19, 2003 Whitehall address, an important speech in which the President acknowledged America's commitment to NATO and other multilateral institutions. He also noted that NATO SYG de Hoop Scheffer was the first foreign visitor to the Oval Office after President Bush won re-election -- another sign of U.S. commitment to NATO. Moreover, the President's first official trip abroad after the State of the Union Address will be to Brussels for a NATO summit in early February; NATO-EU meetings will also take place.

6. (U) Burns said that some in Europe assume NATO is a Cold War institution. That characterization is no longer accurate. The transformation of NATO, from an American perspective, has been strongly due to the course of events after September 11, 2001, and to the evolution in military technology, which is far advanced from the Cold War. President Bush's multilateral vision for NATO that he laid out at the NATO Summit in Istanbul this past June includes integrating the two military missions, OEF and ISAF, in Afghanistan; collective training conducted by NATO in Iraq; and NATO's Istanbul Cooperation Initiative for outreach to

the Arab world.

17. (U) Burns explained that there is strong bipartisan support for NATO in the U.S. While nations still believe the U.S. is using NATO as a "tool box," the U.S. has been the prime proponent of NATO reform and for greater NATO roles in Iraq and Afghanistan. As the Alliance focuses on its 2005 agenda, we want to put Trans-Atlantic differences behind us and move forward.

18. (C) Asked by Under Secretary Laajava whether the U.S. is pleased with the condition of the Alliance, Ambassador Burns said that on the political side the right decisions are being made -- new members are being taken in and NATO is reforming its relations with Russia. But on the military side the gap is wide, particularly in the area of capabilities. The U.S. defense budget is more than twice that of the other Allies put together. NATO members' defense spending should be around two percent of GDP, yet many countries (Canada, Spain, Germany, the Netherlands, and others) are below this level. Eleven members spend more than 60 percent of their defense budgets on personnel costs alone. And Lord Robertson estimated that of the 2.4 million men and women in uniform in Europe, only three-five percent can be deployed beyond their borders. As a result, more and more of the burden is borne by the U.S., UK, France, Norway, and others. With the U.S. deeply committed to Iraq, other nations have had to take up more of the burden in Afghanistan -- where the European allies have been slow to deploy. Laajava agreed, recalling the difficulty in finding the helicopters to deploy Finnish troops to the PRT in Meymaneh, Afghanistan.

19. (SBU) Ambassador Mack raised the point of the current legislation under consideration in the Finnish Parliament to amend the peacekeeping law to permit troop deployment based on an EU mandate. Political Director-designate Vierros-Villeneuve said Parliament seems to favor changing the legislation in regards to an EU mandate. Burns said we applaud the formation of EU battlegroups, if they allow Europe to be more proficient. But if they begin to undercut the NATO Response Force -- the largest NATO reform in recent years -- then there will be problems. Security Policy Director Kalkku said it will be necessary to ensure that the same unit does not serve standby duty for a battlegroup and for the NRF consecutively.

110. (C) In discussing the NATO-EU relationship, Ambassador Burns described it as a symbiotic relationship in some ways, where 19 of the 25 EU nations are also NATO members. He said the U.S. strongly supports EU giving ESDP greater identity, "and if it leads to greater capabilities, we'll be delighted." Problems arise when some in Europe, such as French President Chirac, would like to turn the EU into a strategic counterweight to the U.S. These attempts to make the EU and NATO competitive make the relationship difficult and would be resisted by Europeans like Denmark, Norway, the UK, and Italy.

111. (C) Laajava remarked that he had encountered "quite strong sentiments" in Congress on this issue when he was Ambassador to the U.S. He affirmed that it is important to shift attention to focus on the world's real problems instead of criticizing institutions. Burns said that NATO has to remain the pre-eminent Trans-Atlantic security institution, which will lead it to even greater capabilities. Laajava was supportive to say that Finland's way is to generate and gather positive identification with the EU. During the Cold War, identification was close to home for Finland. Now, Finland finds that identification and political capital are with the EU.

112. (C) Afghanistan: Burns said he did not think the NATO mission has deployed as fast and strong as we had hoped. NATO has not succeeded in raising troops for an expansion to western Afghanistan. Its shortfalls make clear that without a U.S. lead ISAF has been severely hampered. But he hoped to see improvements in 2005. The upcoming NATO Defense Ministers' meeting in Nice in February will be a forum where these issues will begin to be addressed, with the goal of unifying the OEF and ISAF operations under a single NATO command by the summer. Kalkku asked about operational procedures for combining the operations. Burns said one option was to create two task forces under one mission. This will make matters easier for Germany. "And for us," said Kalkku.

113. (C) Burns reassured Laajava that NATO will have a full set of options by the Nice meeting, and encouraged the Finns to get involved in the debate. It will be important for contributing countries such as Finland, Sweden, New Zealand, and Japan to be at the table in the larger troop-contributing country meetings as we discuss this in 2005. Laajava thanked Burns and underscored the importance that public perception be shaped the right way.

114. (C) Kosovo: In answer to a question from Kalkku, Burns

highlighted the U.S. commitment to KFOR. The upcoming spring periodic mission review will decide whether to break down the four quadrants. The allies do not want to see significant troop reductions, although some support personnel could be moved over the horizon to improve KFOR's tooth-to-tail ratio.

Burns said the Allied commanders had been very disappointed in the way some nations' troops had performed in March, and this has led to a focus on national caveats. But the commanders had also praised the Finnish, Swedish, U.S., and Norwegian troops, who did not hesitate to act.

15. (C) Iraq: Ambassador Burns said the U.S. is "absolutely determined" to stay the course. The President is committed and there is strong public support for the war against terrorism. Ambassador Burns asked Laajava what the benchmarks would be for Finland to make additional contributions to Iraq -- either humanitarian, financial, or military assistance. Laajava hesitated to respond and said that they will wait to see what Iraqi elections delivered. Ambassador Mack recalled that Finland had been one of the first countries to contribute to the UN Protection Force, pledging one million euros this past September. Kalkku said the EU is considering a civilian mission, and the GoF might contribute civilian rule-of-law experts to that.

16. (C) The U.S. is committed to a NATO role in Iraq. NATO has begun training Iraqi officers in Baghdad, said Burns. After elections in Iraq, the U.S. hopes more countries will join this effort to train senior Iraqi officers. Partnership for Peace countries are welcome to participate.

17. (U) Partnership for Peace (PfP): Ambassador Burns stressed that the future of PfP is promising, with countries like Finland and Sweden as the intellectual driving force, and he thanked Laajava for the joint paper on PfP options that the two countries had contributed. NATO is looking to Central Asia, the Caucasus, and the Middle East as new areas for an expanded partnership. This conceptual, intellectual leadership of Finland is instrumental to developing PfP leadership.

18. (U) NATO-Russia: Ambassador Burns said the U.S. is convinced that we must keep working with Russia, including within NATO at the NATO-Russian Council. The NATO-Russia agenda has focused so far on Russia's Istanbul Commitments in Georgia and Moldova, and lately on Ukraine. There is ongoing cooperation on issues of common concern such as theater missile defense and protecting civilian populations against chemical attack.

MoD Meeting

19. (SBU) At the Ministry of Defense, Ambassador Burns first participated in a roundtable discussion with senior MoD officials, then met with the Minister. Finnish participants in the roundtable included: Lt. General (ret.) Matti Ahola, MoD Permanent Secretary; Pauli Jarvenpaa, Director General for Policy; Jyrkki Iivonen, MoD Public Affairs Director; Colonel Sakari Honkamaa, Finnish Defense Staff; Colonel Arto Raty, Director of the National Defense Course; and Karolina Honkanen, MoD Researcher and author of a study on small states in NATO.

20. (C) The Finns began the roundtable by asking Ambassador Burns how the second Bush Administration would approach NATO, and in general what would be the Administration's posture toward Europe. The Ambassador replied by first thanking the Finns for their contributions to NATO in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan. He said that it was important to think about how PfP countries could be "at the table" more to inform NATO decision-making. Burns said that the past two years had been rocky ones for NATO and for Trans-Atlantic relations. However, he believed that the debate was turning away from one about the action in Iraq to one over how best to stabilize the situation there and help the Iraqi people. The Administration was interested in moving forward, not dwelling on the past two years, and the Ambassador opined that 2005 should be a much better year and renew the close Trans-Atlantic ties that were valued by all. Pointing to the President's trip to Brussels in February, he said that the President was serious about reaching out to friends and allies, and that the U.S. was not interested in "going it alone." Dr. Jarvenpaa replied that these were "encouraging words."

21. (C) Iivonen asked the Ambassador for his assessment of the Russia-NATO and Russia-U.S. relationship. The Ambassador said that the U.S. had a realistic view of Russia and was watching recent developments closely. However, he said that the West had to maintain a strategic relationship with Russia and that it would be dangerous to ignore or isolate Moscow. Burns cited several examples of NATO-Russian cooperation, including the theater-missile defense system project, counter-terrorism, counter-proliferation, civil emergency coordination, and maritime search and rescue cooperation.

However, the Ambassador said that neither the U.S. nor NATO was uncritical of the situations in Chechnya, Georgia, Moldova or Ukraine; what was important was to engage the Russians on these issues rather than isolate them.

122. (C) During the roundtable, Dr. Jarvenpaa noted that the capabilities of the EU battlegroups are not very challenging -- he called them "light groups, with simple capability." He said Finland wants close cooperation between the battlegroups and the NRF. The Finns indicated some frustration with the negotiations on the battlegroups, suggesting that the EU's limited military capability meant that the debate over the battlegroups was more over process than designing a system with real military value. Ambassador Burns said that the U.S. supported the concept of EU battlegroups as long as they were consistent with the Berlin Plus agreements and not in conflict with NATO resource needs. The Ambassador cited the abortive EU military headquarters planning cell proposal in April 2003 as unhelpful. He said that it should be possible to deconflict NATO and EU defense policies, but that it wouldn't happen without the two institutions talking about problems areas, and that as regards battlegroups, NATO couldn't even get the issue on the agenda with the EU because of Cypriot objections.

123. (SBU) Ahola referred to a statement the previous week by the Finnish Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee which recommended that the government should call NATO membership a "real option", rather than just a "possibility." He also said that a new official poll had found support by the Finnish population for NATO membership had grown to 34 percent. He saw this as very good news, noting that the all-time low had been 11 percent.

124. (C) After the Roundtable, Ambassador Burns had an office call with Minister of Defense Seppo Kaariainen. The Minister spoke warmly about his visit to the U.S. in April 2004, and noted that he found particularly interesting the briefings on transformation he got at the Joint Forces Command and Pentagon. He said he took to heart a quote, "It is not enough to make things better, we must make better things." Kaariainen said Parliament's review of the Security and Defense Policy White Paper will be completed by the third week of December. It is his impression that the White Paper is "very European", emphasizing that Finland will participate fully in the ESDP. The EU has made very fast progress on many defense issues, including battlegroups, headline goals, and Operation ALTHEA. Finland's aim is to "participate fully, without conditions."

125. (C) Kaariainen also emphasized the importance Finland puts on the Trans-Atlantic link and relations with the U.S. -- through NATO, through the EU, and bilaterally. He said, "In some areas, we are natural competitors, but we need to work together on crisis management." He noted that the White Paper lists NATO "as an option in the future" and that for now Finland has a very practical relationship with NATO, particularly with cooperation in the Balkans and Afghanistan. Kaariainen noted that Finland has good relations with Russia, especially in the area of trade. He noted the particular economic importance of the St. Petersburg area to Finland. He added there is a need for "clear rules" for Air Policing, for example air traffic control procedures, and that NATO's new relationship in the Baltics has "stabilized" the Baltic Sea region.

MACK